



National Audubon Society

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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0512

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0303

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2915

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4401

December 5, 2019

Re: Coastal and Great Lakes Communities Enhancement Act (H.R. 729, consolidating ten-bills including H.R. 3115, H.R. 3596, H.R. 2185, H.R. 3541, H.R. 1747, H.R. 1023, H.R. 2189, H.R. 1314, and H.R. 2405)

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Chair Grijalva, and Ranking Member Bishop:

The National Audubon Society and its 1.6 million members support the Coastal and Great Lakes Communities Enhancement Act, which will help coastal states and communities prepare for impacts from flooding, sea level rise, ocean acidification, and changing weather conditions. This legislation, (consolidating ten bills including H.R. 729, H.R. 3115, H.R. 3596, H.R. 2185, H.R. 3541, H.R. 1747, H.R. 1023, H.R. 2189, H.R. 1314, and H.R. 2405), would provide much needed financial assistance to help communities adapt to the impacts of climate change on coasts and oceans and implement natural infrastructure solutions that will build coastal resilience and deliver important environmental benefits to birds, wildlife, and their habitats.

Coastal communities face significant challenges from sea level rise and more intense storms. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimates that nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population lives in coastal areas, which face increasing threats from rising seas, erosion, and storm hazards. Sea level rise and coastal storms threaten coastal infrastructure and important natural resources that drive local economies. Many coastal communities are already experiencing a significant increase in flooding from extreme storms and high tide flooding. From 2016 to 2018 alone, six separate coastal storms (Matthew, Harvey, Irma, Maria, Florence, and Michael) caused an estimated \$329.9 billion in damages and over 3,000 fatalities; and the number of billion dollar disaster events affecting communities across the

U.S. has doubled since the 1980's.¹ In addition to more catastrophic events, sea level rise is also increasing the number of days coastal communities are experiencing costly "nuisance" or "sunny day" flooding. NOAA estimates that some communities have seen a 300 percent to more than 900 percent increase in nuisance flooding over the last 50 years and that 170 coastal communities across the U.S. will be affected by nuisance flooding more than 26 times per year by 2035 (an increase from just 2.1 days per year 50 years ago).² And sea level rise is accelerating, which will exacerbate the risks to communities from both routine and catastrophic flooding.

At the 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) this month in Madrid, Spain – which is being called the "Blue COP" – the international community is specifically highlighting the unique threats that climate change poses to oceans, coastal areas, and ecosystems – including wetlands, estuaries, and deltas – and the benefits these systems deliver to livelihoods and quality of life for coastal communities in the U.S. and across the globe. Low-lying coastal areas are home to 10 percent of the world's population (more than 680 million people), and coastal fisheries provide jobs for up to 12 percent of the population and feed 1.4 billion people.³ Sea level rise is not only threatening the health, safety and food security of coastal communities, but ocean warming and acidification are also affecting critical habitats for seabirds and economically important fisheries around the world.

The Coastal and Great Lakes Communities Enhancement Act will create grant programs to help states and communities invest in resilience initiatives to address these threats to both people and nature. The grants would support adaptation planning and implementation of adaptation projects, including natural infrastructure projects, which will reduce risks to coastal communities and enhance the environment. Natural infrastructure projects – including restoring wetlands and installing living shorelines like oyster reefs – help to reduce flood risks to communities while also delivering important environmental benefits, such as improved water quality and habitat for birds and other wildlife. NOAA estimates that natural infrastructure, such as coastal wetlands, provide more than \$23 billion annually in storm protection services alone.⁴

Specifically, the following programs created by the Act would benefit both coastal resiliency and the environment:

- **The Living Shorelines Grant Program (Sec. 102)** would provide financial assistance to help states, localities, and non-governmental organizations construct "climate-resilient" living shoreline projects to protect communities from extreme weather, while enhancing important coastal bird habitat that helps reverse declines in shorebird populations. The Act would also provide much needed funding to monitor and assess the economic and environmental benefits of these types of projects.

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "2018's Billion Dollar Disasters in Context." February 7, 2019. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2018s-billion-dollar-disasters-context>

² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Climate Change: Global Sea Level." August 1, 2018. <https://www.climate.gov/newsfeatures/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level>

³ United Nations Climate Change, "Climate Conference to Spur Action on the Ocean." December 2, 2019. <https://unfccc.int/news/climate-conference-to-spur-action-on-the-ocean>

⁴ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Fast Facts: Natural Infrastructure." Undated. <https://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/natural-infrastructure.html>

- **The Climate Change Adaptation Preparedness and Response Program (Sec. 106)** would provide grants and technical assistance to states to support planning for climate change impacts on our coasts and the implementation of coastal adaptation projects, including natural infrastructure projects. With sea level rise and an increase in the frequency and strength of storms predicted into the future, this program will provide the critical resources state and communities need to prepare for increasing flood risks and to preserve important coastal ecosystems.
- **The National Fish Habitat Conservation through Partnerships program (Title II, Subtitle A)** encourages the conservation of fish habitat, which has benefits for birds. Fish make-up the diets of seabirds and shorebirds and often, fish and birds share habitat such as eelgrass and wetlands.
- **The Great Lakes Fishery Research Authorization (Title II, Subtitle B)** provides an important dedicated funding stream and authorizing legislation to enhance fisheries management in the Great Lakes. Great Lakes fisheries are both ecologically and economically significant contributing more than \$7 billion annually to the national economy and supporting 139 native species that provide important food sources for humans, wildlife, and birds.⁵ Preservation of this important resource requires funding for sound science and management and restoration activities that will be provided by this legislation.
- **National Sea Grant College Program Amendments (Title IV)** reauthorizes the National Sea Grant program that provides critical research and technical assistance to help state and local communities enhance coastal resilience and restore coastal ecosystems. Sea Grant programs have been critical partners bringing together public agencies with nonprofit organizations to advance community-based projects to improve coastal management and environmental protection.

The Coastal and Great Lakes Communities Enhancement Act would help states and communities reduce their vulnerability to costly and destructive acts of nature and preserve and protect important coastal ecosystems. It would also help communities and states plan for future risks and employ nature-based methods to reduce flood and storm damages. These programs will provide multiple benefits at the federal, state, and local levels, including saving taxpayer dollars by avoiding disaster-related expenditures, enhancing public safety, and providing environmental benefits. On behalf of the National Audubon Society's more than 1.6 million members, we encourage your support of the Coastal and Great Lakes Communities Enhancement Act.

⁵ Great Lakes Fishery Commission, "The Great Lakes Fishery: A world-class resource!". Undated. <http://www.glfc.org/the-fishery.php>

We look forward to working with you on these and similar issues that protect birds and the habitats they need to survive and thrive in the face of climate change.

Sincerely,

Karen Hyun, Ph.D.
Vice President, Coastal Conservation
National Audubon Society